

**Tool 1(intro).1.** Iowa Association of School Boards Paper (page 1 of 2)

## **Ways to Help Your Community Understand Staff Development**

Consider these tips for ways your school district can build community understanding around staff development. This resource and others can be found on the Iowa Association of School Boards' web site: [www.ia-sb.org](http://www.ia-sb.org).

Parents and community members may not always agree with educators as to the role staff development plays in improving student achievement. As the new school year gets underway it is important to start explaining how staff development works and the way it will be offered in your district's school buildings during the coming year.

The more staff development activities affect the routines of students and their families, the less support it will receive from parents and others in the community. Disruptions to dismissal times can become a major problem for parents who are relying on child care services and who have established after-school activities for their children.

In many districts there are certain days identified during the year as inservice or professional development days. These are usually published well in advance and are noted on district calendars. As a result of this advanced notice they generally are accommodated by families and routinely accepted. If such days are scheduled in your district, don't assume that parents will always remember them. Put reminders in your school newsletter, and make sure the early release or no school dates are part of the information packets you supply to parents and students who are new to your school.

As districts are relying more and more on half-day professional development activities, it becomes necessary to increase the communication. The following suggested activities will help you win support for such important training and educational activities.

- ☐ Teachers need to explain to their students what the early release means and why it has been arranged. Encourage teachers to tell their students what they will be learning and how they plan to use it back in the classroom.
- ☐ Make sure the entire staff of each school building clearly understands what is to be the focus of training during the year. Is there to be one theme or a variety of focuses depending on the grade level or the time of the year? Clearly explain what training will be conducted and who will be involved. All staff? Teachers only? Certificated or classified employees? Don't forget to emphasize why continuing professional development is necessary and the benefits a well-trained staff will ultimately provide to students.
- ☐ Assuming you have the support of your local teachers' association, ask it to include information about the training in its publications. Provide information to other employee group publications so that they can be part of the information distribution process. Request endorsements from these groups and encourage them to speak out publicly about why such training is important.
- ☐ Work with parent booster organizations. Make sure their members understand the importance of the professional development and the schedule you have established for it. Ask them to help publicize it in their regular communication with members. Parent organizations might also be willing to sponsor activities for students during the time you have staff training.
- ☐ Post the information on your school Web site.
- ☐ Use explanations that are clear and simple. Don't get caught up in educational jargon. Use a common sense approach; for example: "After six or seven hours of teaching 20 third-grade students, Jane Doe doesn't have the energy to focus on new teaching techniques. The early release time allows teachers to have more energy which can be focused on their own learning rather than on teaching others."

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*Another example:* Your school district could create a flyer in which the cover said, “There are 986 reasons we’re letting school out early each Wednesday.” Inside, the flyer would explain, “There are 986 students enrolled in the Our Town Schools. Early release days, which will occur each Wednesday, will be devoted to finding new and better ways to educate each and every one of them.”

- ❑ Meet with the editorial boards of your local newspapers. Discuss the early release days and the importance of them to improving student achievement. Seek an editorial in support of your training AND early release time.
- ❑ Make regular reports at school board meetings so that your district’s elected officials understand what you are accomplishing and why it is important to students and their parents.
- ❑ Show the cost effectiveness of early release training versus having staff members come in on a Saturday. Include that information when discussing teacher professional development with parents and members of the business community.
- ❑ Report to parents and the community on a regular basis. Let them know how the staff training is working. Have a teacher or one of the invited guests write an article about the training and use it in a newsletter or submit it to the local paper.
- ❑ Never forget that the focus of the explanations and information should be on the affect the learning for staff is having on student academic achievement.

Adapted from material originally published in PR Express, IASB’s communication subscription service for Iowa schools.

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### **Example of a Professional Development Board Policy**

A local school board in Iowa adopted this statement as board policy pertaining to professional development.

The Board of Directors shall maintain and support a comprehensive career development program for the professional development of its staff, and shall budget for the program in accordance with state requirements. It is the policy of the school district to support the connection between educator professional development and improved student achievement.

Under the direction of the Superintendent or his/her designee, the District and each school building shall annually establish school improvement priorities with an aligned action plan for professional development. Each school will develop and implement a professional development system with the following characteristics:

1. Its primary focus is improved student learning and achievement.
2. It is based upon current, documented research findings.
3. It focuses upon content and curricular needs as well as teaching methodology.
4. It utilizes approved content providers.
5. It is developed and directed by professional educators.
6. It is aligned with teacher and administrative performance standards.

Each principal, working in collaboration with the Superintendent or his/her designee, will report annually to the Board of Directors the effectiveness of their building’s professional development system and its relationship to its student achievement goals identified in its school improvement plan.

Adopted: 4/09/04